DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 203 238 CG 015 221

AUTHOR Fields, Ann Brown
TITLE Father Presence/Absence and Its Relationship to Instrumentality in Children.
PUB DATE Sep 80
NOTE 24p.: Paper presented at the Annual Convention of the American Psychological Association (88th, Montreal, Quebec, Canada, September 1-5, 1980).

EDRS PRICE MF01 Plus Postage. PC Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS *Childhood Needs; Child Rearing; Children; *Family Environment; *Fatherless Family; Fathers; *Parent Child Relationship; Parent Role; *Personality Development; *Sex Role

ABSTRACT

Father absence and measures of sex role attitudes in children have been examined in previous research. To investigate whether father presence is more likely to be positively related to instrumentality in both boys and girls, children and their parents completed questionnaires. Boys scored higher than girls on the instrumentality measures. Children living with the mother scored significantly lower on instrumentality than children living with the father or with both parents. No such results were apparent when analyzed in terms of whether the child had ever experienced father absence. Girls' instrumentality had a greater relationship to father presence and time spent with the father. Results suggest that all children, but especially father-absent children and girls in particular, would benefit from contact with an adult male, such as male elementary teachers, Big Brother programs for girls, and family friendships with adult males. In particular, fathers should be encouraged to spend time with their children. (JAC)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED203238

HARD COPY NOT AVAILABLE

FATHER PRESENCE/ABSENCE AND ITS RELATIONSHIP TO INSTRUMENTALITY IN CHILDREN

Ann Brown Fields

Austin Independent School District
Austin, TX

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL IN MICROFICHE ONLY HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Ann B. Fields

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

CG 015221

Paper presented at the Annual Convention of the American Psychological Association, Montreal, September, 1980.

FATHER PRESENCE/ABSENCE AND ITS RELATIONSHIP TO INSTRUMENTALITY IN CHILDREN

Ann Brown Fields
Austin Independent School District

The incidence of father absence in American family life today makes it an important factor for millions of Americans. "In 1960, 88 percent of all children under 18 lived in families with both parents present, but by 1975 this proportion had declined to 80 percent" (Norton & Glick, 1976, p. 4). Ninety percent of those in one-parent homes lived with the mother. Despite this increasing frequency of single-parent families, however, children and adults often feel that "if no father is present, something is 'wrong.' Children often feel different from and left out of larger society when 'everyone else' has two parents" (Weinraub, 1978, p. 126).

Researchers have found that father absence generally (a) has a greater impact on sex role orientation than it does on any other aspect of development (Burton & Whiting, 1961; Hetherington, 1965, 1966, 1972; Hetherington & Deur, 1975; Leichty, 1960; Santrock, 1970), and affects boys more than girls (Hetherington, 1965, 1972; Santrock, 1970). This impact is greatest where father absence occurs before the child reaches age 5 (Biller, 1976; Biller & Weiss, 1970; Hetherington, 1972; Hetherington & Deur, 1975; Leichty, 1960). For boys, father absence tends to be associated with less appropriate

sex typed behavior which is most apparent in pre-teen years (Bach, 1946; Sears, P.S., 1951; Sears, Pintler & Sears, 1946), but may disappear with adolescence (Sears, P.S., 1951). For girls, effects of father absence have tended not to be found until adolescence, when the most typical finding is a disruption in modes of relating to males in preparation for adult heterosexual behavior (Hetherington, 1972; Hunt & Hunt, 1977).

Relatively little research has been done upon the relationship between father presence/absence and the personality and cognitive development of girls. The most notable exception, the work of E.M. Hetherington, centers upon the effects which occur in adolescence.

The question arises where (a) there may be some father absence effects on girls before adolescence, effects which are predictable from developmental and personality theory but which are not strictly related to modes of relating to males, and (b) there may be some father absence effects on boys and girls which do not fall strictly under the heading of sex role orientation. It would seem possible that with the emphasis upon sex role development other developmental areas may have been overlooked. It is with these possibilities in mind that the author embarked upon this study.

Perhaps the most widely read theoretical statement regarding the father's impact on instrumentality in children is that by Parsons (1955). According to Parsons, the father is the task leader in the family. By his example and his all-powerful control over rewards and punishments he shapes instrumental behavior in both sons and daughters.

The mother, on the other hand, is viewed as the expressive leader.

> The instrumental-expressive distinction we interpret as essentially the differentiation of function, and hence of relative influence, in terms of "external" vs. "internal" functions of the system. The area of instrumental function concerns relations of the system to its situation outside the system, to meeting the adaptive conditions of its maintenance of equilibrium, and "instrumentally" establishing the desired relations to external goal objects. The expressive area concerns the "internal" affairs of the system, the maintenance of integrative relations between the members, and regulation of the patterns and tension levels of its component units. (Parsons, 1955, pp. 46-47)

Generally, according to Parsons, though both boys and girls learn instrumentality and expressiveness, boys become instrumental, and girls, expressive.

Generally, the theory has been tested only with boys, since father absence has been hypothesized to affect sex role. The father absent boy has been hypothesized to be less instrumental and the father absent girl, less expressive than their father present counterparts. If in fact the father is the instrumental leader of the family, then the absence of the father should be related to lower instrumentality in both boys and girls.

In formulating hypotheses it is first necessary to define instrumentality more completely than was done by Parsons. Bem, in a more recent formulation of instrumentality, defines an instrumental orientation as "a cognitive focus on 'getting the job done'" (Bem, 1972, p. 10). She argues that a restriction of males to an instrumental orientation and females to an expressive orientation is not adaptive across situations. Bem further contends that instrumentality

and expressiveness are not opposite ends of the same continuum and are not mutually exclusive. It is possible to be high on both instrumentality and expressiveness and desirable to exhibit either or both depending upon the situation.

Spence and Helmreich (1978b) distinguish between the psychological dimensions of masculinity and femininity on one hand and masculine and feminine sex roles on the other and state that

> masculine and feminine attributes, while they differentiate the sexes to some degree, are not bipolar opposites but in each sex are separate and essentially orthogonal dimensions. (1978b, p. 3)

Instrumentality, then, is basically involved with managing the external affairs of the system (in ways such as earning a living), being involved in "getting the job done" behaviors and doing the active kinds of things that men and boys frequently are engaged in. Instrumentality is adaptive in both males and females depending upon the demands of the situation.

Hypotheses

Hypothesis 1. Instrumentality scores for father present boys and girls will be higher than those for father absent boys and girls. Rationale. This should be the case if the father is truly the instrumental leader of the family. In a general sense this relationship has been demonstrated for boys in that measurement of sex role for boys has usually involved measurement of instrumentality. This has not been the case for girls.

Hypothesis 2. In both father present and father absent homes, amount of contact with an adult male will be positively related to instrumentality scores for both boys and girls.

Rationale. Children from father absent homes may have as extensive contact with adult males (in male friends, relatives and teachers) as do those in father present homes. It is also probable that degrees of father presence/absence exist within intact homes and that even these degrees of father presence/absence also affect children's instrumentality. The effect is not wholly dependent on the presence of the child's biological father or even necessarily an adult male in the home.

Subjects

Subjects (N = 200) were drawn from grades kindergarten through four in three private schools (N = 65) in a large Southwestern city and from two public schools (N = 135) in a neighboring suburb. All children grades kindergarten through four in the private schools and approximately half of those in the public schools were invited to participate in the study. In the public schools whole classes were chosen for invitation on the basis of scheduling convenience for the schools. The children's parents received a letter explaining the study and a consent form. Children ranged in age from 5 to 11 years. Family questionnaires were sent to the mothers or stepmothers of all 200 children. Questionnaires were returned by 144 of these adults.

Data Collection Methods

Father presence/absence was defined in two different ways. Children were asked with whom they lived at the time of the study. The adult respondent (usually the mother) was asked to indicate whether the child had ever experienced absence of the father or other adult male for at least three consecutive months. Data were present, then, which were indicative both of current father presence/absence and of father presence/absence in the past.

Data regarding amount of time the child spent with the father were also gathered from two sources, both children and their mothers. Children were asked to indicate on a three-point scale how much time they spent with their fathers: "very little time or not time at all," "a medium amount of time," or "lots of time." The mother was asked to estimate the number of hours the child spent doing things with the father or other adult male per average week day, per average weekend day and per average seven-day week.

According to the children's reports, 27 lived with their mother only; 167, with both mother and father; and 6, with their father only. Again, according to the children, 84 spent "a whole lot" of time with their father; 71 spent a "medium amount" of time with their father; and 33 spent "very little or no time at all" with their father. According to the mothers, 104 had not ever experienced as much as three months absence of an adult male from the home, while 27 had experienced such absence.

Instrumentality was defined by the masculinity score on the Children's Personal Attributes Questionnaire (CPAQ) (Spence & Helmreich, 1978). The CPAQ is based on the premise that there are attributes which are more characteristic of one sex than of the other but which are socially desirable for either. Those attributes which are more characteristic of boys make up the masculine scale; those which are more characteristic of girls, the feminine scale. There is yet another scale, the masculine-feminine scale, the items of which are socially desirable in one sex but not in the other. Only the masculine scale was utilized in the present study. Items on the masculine scale are descriptive of the instrumental individual.

The CPAQ is administered orally. The experimenter reads an item of the following form: "Think about a child who watches TV a lot. This child watches as much TV as they can. Mark how much you watch TV." Children then mark an X in a small, medium or large square on their answer sheets to indicate whether they watch TV "only a little bit or not at all," "somewhat or a middle-sized amount," or "a lot."

Results

Hypothesis 1. Instrumentality scores for father present boys and girls will be higher than those for father absent boys and girls.

This hypothesis received some support from the analyses of variance. The means appear in Tables 1 and 2. The main effect for

TABLE 1

Instrumentality by Sex of Child and Lives With

Lives With	SEX								
	Male			Female			Total		
	N	M	SD	N	M	SD	N	M	SD
Mother	9	5.3333	2.6458	18	3.8889	1.8114	27	4.3704	2.1865
Mother & Father	81	6.0000	2.2136	82	5.0732	2.3082	163	5.5337	2.3021
Father	1	4.0000	0	4	6.5000	2.3805	5	6.0000	2.3452
Total	91	5.9121	2.2492	104	4.9231	2.2799	195	5.3846	2.3133

TABLE 2

Instrumentality by Sex of Child and Father Always Present

Father Always Present	SEX								
	Male			Female			Total		
	N	M	SD	N	M	SD	N	M	SD
No	8	4.7500	1.9086	19	5.0000	2.3570	27	4.9259	2.2001
Yes	52	5.9615	2.2048	50	5.1600	2.2256	102	5.5685	2.2405
Total	60	5.8000	2.1924	69	5.1159	2.2461	129	5.4341	2.2390

"lives with" (derived from the children's answers to whether they lived with both mother and father, mother only, father only or neither) approached significance, $F(2, 189) = 2.71$, $p = .07$, with the mean score for children who lived with their mothers only being well below the grand mean. "Father always present," the measure of whether a child had ever experienced father absence, did not account for a significant main effect. Boys scored higher on instrumentality than did girls, with this main effect being significant when "lives with" was utilized as father presence/absence definition, $F(1, 189) = 8.24$, $p < .01$; and approaching significance when "father always present" was utilized, $F(1, 125) = 2.36$, $p = .13$. None of the interactions between sex of the child and father presence/absence was significant.

In order to consider the impact of socioeconomic status on instrumentality, the correlation was calculated between mother's education and instrumentality. The correlation was extremely small and nonsignificant.

In terms of this hypothesis, the results indicate some support. Children who lived with their fathers scored significantly higher on the instrumentality measure than those who did not. Such an effect was not present in the case of children who had ever experienced father absence versus those who had not. Any effect here, then, seems to be related to current presence/absence of the father rather than a long-term effect of previous absence. The lack of an significant interaction between sex of the child and

father presence/absence indicates that this is an area where both boys and girls are significantly affected in much the same way.

There was an expected main effect for sex of the child, with boys scoring higher on instrumentality than did girls.

Socioeconomic status was considered and rejected as an alternative explanation in that the correlation between mother's education and child's instrumentality was extremely small and non-significant. Previous studies have frequently not taken this variable into consideration in assessing the effects of father absence. It probably would be more meaningful, however, in terms of present economic status, to utilize the current annual income of the family as a measure of economic status, rather than education. It would be entirely possible for a well educated mother and her children to suffer a drop in economic status as a result of father absence.

Hypothesis 2. In both father present and father absent homes, amount of contact with an adult male will be positively related to instrumentality scores for both boys and girls.

The results, shown in Table 3, indicate partial support for the hypothesis. Pearson correlations were calculated among masculinity score on the CPAQ, children's reports of amount of time spent with their father, and mothers' or stepmothers' reports of amount of time spent with an adult male. The adult males with whom the children had most contact were the father (N = 118), stepfather (N = 7), grandfather (N = 4), uncle (N = 4), brother (N = 1), and other (usually mother's boyfriend) (N = 6). These correlations

TABLE 3

Correlations: Children's Instrumentality and Time with Father as Reported by Child and Mother

	CPAQ-M	Time with Father	Hours Avg. Week Day	Hours Avg. Weekend Day	Hours Avg. Week
Total Sample					
CPAQ-M		.1832**	.030	.101	-.001
Time			.394**	.380**	.341**
Week Day				.526**	.800**
Weekend Day					.780**
Week					
Girls are above diagonal; boys, below					
CPAQ-M		.281**	-.055	.076	-.098
Time	.060		.360**	.425**	.400**
Week Day	.152	.448**		.671**	.810**
Weekend Day	.139	.322**	.572**		.777**
Week	.103	.265*	.780**	.789**	
Father always present above diagonal; father not always present, below.					
CPAQ-M		.256**	.034	.171*	.014
Time	.106		.313**	.294**	.265*
Week Day	-.077	.454**		.585**	.747**
Weekend Day	-.108	.438**	.654**		.751**
Week	-.163	.363*	.855**	.794**	

*p < .05; **p < .01.

were calculated separately for all children, boys, girls, father absent and father present children. In this case, father presence/absence was defined by the child's ever having experienced father absence.

As shown in Table 3, there is a significant positive relationship between the child's report of time spent with the father and the adult respondent's report of average number of hours an adult male spends with the child on a week day, a weekend day, and in an average week. Results supported the hypothesis for the total group, for girls and for children who had not experienced father absence.

For the total group of children, there was a significant positive relationship between instrumentality and the child's report of time with the father, but not the adult's report of time spent with the father.

The relationship between time with father and instrumentality varied with sex of the child. For girls there was a significant positive relationship between instrumentality and their own report of time with their father, but no significant relationship between instrumentality and the adult respondent's report of time with an adult male. For boys, there were no significant relationships between instrumentality and either their own or their mothers' (or stepmothers') reports of time spent with the father or other adult male.

The relationship between time with father and instrumentality varied with whether the child had experienced father absence. For children who had not experienced father absence, there was a significant positive correlation between instrumentality and (a) their report of time spent with their father, and (b) the adult respondent's report of hours the child spent with an adult male on the average weekend day. No such significant relationships existed for children who had experienced father absence.

The results can be interpreted as follows: For the total group, there was a significant positive relationship between amount of time spent with the father (as reported by the children) and children's instrumentality scores. Even though there was a significant positive correlation between children's report of time with their father and mother's report of children's time with an adult male, there was no significant relationship between instrumentality and mother's report of time with an adult male. This result could be construed to mean that the child's perception of amount of time spent with the father is the salient variable in this case.

For girls, the data again support the hypothesis, there being a significant positive relationship between instrumentality and the girls' report of time with their fathers. Again, however, there was no significant relationship between mothers' report of children's time with an adult male and children's instrumentality. For boys there was no significant relationship between time spent with the father and instrumentality. In this situation, then,

girls appear to be more clearly affected by the presence of the father (in terms of amount of time) than are boys. This finding is further evidence of (1) an effect of father presence/absence upon girls before adolescence, (2) an effect upon girls which is not strictly related to sex role, and (3) an effect of father presence/absence even within the intact home.

Among children who had not experienced father absence, an additional positive relationship existed between instrumentality and amount of time spent with the child on the average weekend day (as reported by the mother). Such a result may be indicative of differential salience of time spent together on the weekend as opposed to time spent together during the week. Weekends tend to be the time when children do more with their fathers, and as such may be viewed differently by children and seem to be of more importance at least in terms of this variable.

Conclusions

In this study, the relationship between father presence/absence and instrumentality varied depending upon the definition of father presence/absence utilized. When children's reports of adults with whom they lived were considered, children who lived with their fathers were more instrumental than those who did not. When adults' reports of whether children had always lived with their fathers were utilized, there were no differences in instrumentality between children who had always lived with their fathers and those who had not always lived with their fathers. In this sense,

instrumentality appears to be related to current presence of the father rather than constance presence throughout the child's lifetime. This explanation gains further support from the finding of a significant positive relationship between child's instrumentality and time spent with the father since time with father is also a measure of current status.

Girls' instrumentality appears to have a greater relationship to father presence and time with father than does boys' instrumentality. This may be the case possibly because of higher levels of instrumentality in boys and greater cultural expectations of instrumentality in boys generally.

Time spent with the father on the weekend was associated with greater instrumentality in children. Time spent together on weekdays or during a full week was not associated with any such effect. This finding lends credibility to a differential salience hypothesis whereby time spent together on the weekend is more salient in its impact on children than is time during the week. This may be related to the children's expectations of amount of time the father will be available to them.

Implications

Lessened instrumentality in children who do not live with their father could be expected to manifest itself in general goal-oriented or "getting the job done" behaviors. The most instructive finding here, however, is that the amount of time spent with an adult male may ameliorate this effect for girls. All children, but

especially father absent children, girls in particular, would probably benefit from contact with an adult male, regardless of whether that person is the father. These findings would lend support for (1) male teachers in elementary schools, (2) efforts by fathers to spend time with their children, (3) efforts by mothers in father absent families to encourage contact with adult males, (4) programs such as Big Brothers for girls as well as boys, and (5) adult male contact for girls in other community activities such as Girl Scouts, Campfire and church related activities.

Questions which might be addressed in further research include the following:

1. Does reason for father absence affect instrumentality? If so, how?

2. What attributes or behaviors of the mother affect instrumentality in father present and father absent children?

3. Are there differential effects of father absence in differing ethnic groups?

4. What kinds of interaction between fathers and children foster instrumentality?

5. What are the social and economic concomitants of father absence? How might these concomitants be related to the child's instrumentality?

Some of the same questions addressed in the current study might be more adequately answered by the use of different samples or methodology. Longitudinal study of a large group of children

from birth through approximately age ten might shed light on the developmental effects of father presence/absence and amount of time spent with an adult male. A much larger sample might be utilized, incorporating equal numbers of children in various father present/absent categories. The effect of siblings might be assessed. Other more behavioral measures of instrumentality might also be utilized to assess this variable across situations.

Another fruitful line of inquiry is to examine what does exist in the life of a father absent child. The child in most cases lives with the mother. How does she react differently to the child than does the mother in an intact home? What social pressures exist upon a child who does not have a father at home? How do leisure time activities differ from those in an intact home? How do aspirations differ? It is possible that there are some positive effects of the one parent home. This possibility deserves attention.

Whatever the specific questions asked in further research, it is important not to treat father absence as a simple construct. In this study, an attempt was made to consider or control for variables such as age, sex, and economic status of the child. As these and other variables suggested above are taken into consideration, father presence/absence will come to be viewed as the complex phenomenon which it is. It is becoming increasingly evident, however, that in future research parent and child variables must be examined not only in isolation but also in the interaction which occurs between parents, between parents and their children, and

between children in a family. Interactions between the individuals or family and the external world must also be considered.

REFERENCES

Bach, G.R. Father-fantasies and father-typing in father-separated children. Child Development, 1946, 17, 63-80.

Bem, S. Psychology looks at sex roles: Where have all the androgynous people gone? Paper presented at UCLA Symposium on Women, May, 1972.

Biller, H.B. The father and personality development: Paternal deprivation and sex-role development. In M.E. Lamb (Ed.), The role of the father in child development. New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1976.

Burton, R.V., & Whiting, J.W.M. The absent father and cross-sex identity. Merrill-Palmer Quarterly, 1961, 7, 85-95.

Hetherington, E.M. A developmental study of the effects of sex of the dominant parent on sex-role preference, identification, and imitation in children. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 1965, 2, 188-194.

Hetherington, E.M. Effects of paternal absence on sex-typed behavior in Negro and white preadolescent males. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 1966, 4, 87-91.

Hetherington, E.M. Effects of father absence on personality development in adolescent daughters. Developmental Psychology, 1972, 7, 313-326.

Hetherington, E.M., & Deur, J.L. The effects of father absence on child development. In U. Bronfenbrenner & M. A. Mahoney

(Eds.), Influences on human development, 2nd ed. Hinsdale, Illinois: The Dryden Press, 1975.

Hunt, J.G., & Hunt, L.L. Race, daughters and father-loss: Does absence make the girl grow stronger? Social Problems, 1977, 25, 90-102.

Leichty, M. The absence of the father during early childhood and its effect upon the Oedipal situation as reflected in young adults. Merrill-Palmer Quarterly, 1960, 6, 212-217.

Norton, A.J., & Glick, P.C. Changes in American family life. Children Today, 1976, 5, 2-4, 44.

Parsons, T. Family structure and the socialization of the child. In T. Parsons and R.F. Bales (Eds.) Family, socialization and interaction process. Glencoe, Ill.: Free Press, 1955.

Santrock, J.W. Paternal absence, sex typing, and identification. Developmental Psychology, 1970, 2, 264-272.

Sears, P.S. Doll play aggression in normal young children: Influence of sex, age, sibling status, father's absence. Psychological Monographs, 1951, 65, (6, Whole No. 323).

Sears, R.R., Pintler, M.H., & Sears, P.S. Effect of father separation on preschool children's doll play aggression. Child Development, 1946, 17, 219-243.

Spence, J.T., & Helmreich, R. Children's Test Battery, Children's Personal Attributes Questionnaire, unpublished paper, 1978.

Spence, J.T., & Helmreich, R. Masculinity and feminity: Their psychological dimensions, correlates and antecedents.

Austin, Texas: The University of Texas Press, 1978. (b)

Weinraub, Marsha. Fatherhood: The myth of the second-class parent. In J. H. Stevens, Jr., & Marilyn Mathews (Eds.), Mother/child father/child relationships. Washington, D.C.: National Association for the Education of Young Children, 1978.